

1 April 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Transfer of ONCART to the Air Force

1. During our meeting last Friday, you asked me to give sober consideration to the idea of transferring ONCART to the Air Force. I have examined this proposition carefully and have come to the following conclusions, which are more conviction than opinion.

2. The ONCART was developed to perform covert overhead reconnaissance of denied territory. Originally it was intended to fly over the Soviet Union without being detected by radar. Although its radar cross section specifications have been substantially met, it is now clear that the Soviet radar technology has also advanced, and we have no real confidence that an ONCART flight over the Soviet Union will go undetected. Nevertheless, ONCART does possess a significant - and probably decisive - margin for survival.

3. However, this set of propositions has been translated by some into the following conclusion:

"ONCART will only be used in time of hostilities and therefore should be turned over to the Air Force."

Such a conclusion relates only to the Soviet Union. It is probably founded in a genuine disappointment that the original sales promises for undetected ONCART flights did not materialize. Lastly, there is a natural reluctance to stable an expensive horse which may not be ridden.

4. The above conclusion is a natural reaction to a curious mixture of immediate pressures. However, I have

Copy 3

USAF review(s) completed.

NRO review(s) completed. Release 2007/02/08 : CIA-RDP85B00803R000100180065-4

See 27 Apr. version

[REDACTED]
Page 2

25X1

tried to look ahead along the potential liferoad of OXCART. Firstly, the Air Force is buying thirty or more [REDACTED] aircraft to perform pre-hostility and post-strike reconnaissance according to its own standards, and it is not clear that the twelve OXCART vehicles will enhance that capability. The real proposition is:

25X1

"Should CIA voluntarily strip itself of the natural replacement for its dwindling and increasingly vulnerable U-2 capability?"

The current CIA need for reconnaissance aircraft does not turn on the question of Soviet overflights, so that the present reluctance to approve OXCART flights over the USSR is somewhat beside the point. Of course, it would be wonderful if OXCART could put us back in the USSR business without having to make a difficult decision. However, we flew more U-2 flights per year after 1 May 1960 than we did in the preceding years. The point is that there is a very lively business in covert overflights of denied territory which does not include Soviet Russia, and which demands increasingly high performance aircraft. The OXCART is an essential ingredient of this program. The OXCART operational capability will surely be supported somewhere in the Federal budget, and it is important to assign it to that agency of Government which is charged with covert overflights of denied territory.

5. The basic problem is to designate a single agency of the United States Government as the responsible authority for performing covert overflights. Each Administration should review this franchise, but it should not be up for grabs with each flight. Whoever receives this franchise should be given all the complementary tools needed to carry it out: U-2, OXCART, [REDACTED] etc. I believe that OXCART is an essential member of the stable:

a. OXCART can be deployed to a given area in less than 6 hours with aerial refueling, whereas the U-2 detachments take almost a week to deploy overseas.

b. The OXCART brings its film load back to the U. S. at 2,000 m.p.h., and therefore gives a faster return than the EC-135 couriers we use with the U-2.

Page 3

25X1

c. It is far less vulnerable and hence has wider application and a longer operational life than the U-2, which is now nearing the end of the road in many areas.

d. While we must be prepared to accept the risk of emergency landings with overseas bases, ORCAAT need not be based in foreign countries, as does the U-2.

e. ORCAAT is less likely to be seen by foreign radars than the U-2 because of its significantly reduced radar cross section at all frequencies and therefore is less likely to create the basis for incidents or issues.

f. Because of its range advantage over the U-2, the ORCAAT is far more flexible and operationally responsive for deep flights in areas not close to available bases.

g. ORCAAT has a significant advantage in terms of film coverage over the U-2. For comparable 1 foot resolution, the U-2 with the 112B can photograph a 17-mile strip 3,000 miles long whereas the ORCAAT takes a strip approximately 60 miles wide of the same length.

h. On the other hand, the U-2 with the B camera resolution of 2 to 3 feet can photograph a 2,000 mile strip from horizon to horizon (360) miles which has obvious advantages for search. In this sense the U-2 and ORCAAT aircraft/camera combinations are complementary.

i. The U-2 also has an advantage over the ORCAAT operationally in that it can follow intricate flight plans along borders, rivers or around defenses. Because of very great speed and large turning radius, the ORCAAT must be content with lesser maneuverability, and the two vehicles are again complementary.

These evaluations are independent of pride of authorship. Five or ten years from now we will undoubtedly have other aircraft - or balloons - whose characteristics will make them even more desirable than either ORCAAT or the U-2. The point is that: "The tools go with the trade".

Page 4

25X1

6. The real need is to designate a single agency to carry the covert overflight franchise. The present choice is between CIA and the U. S. Air Force. Essentially the same equipment is available to both groups, and the choice must be made on the basis of operational sophistication and the political potential of plausible denial. I do not put much stock in the second point, even with foreign pilots, since the aircraft all have a Lockheed/CIA trademark. The question then turns on who can handle such affairs with the least amount of fanfare. Recent experience and the ensuing press celebrations of SAC U-2 operations in Southeast Asia

25X1

The problem is not U-2 isolated since we must be prepared to stage or recover other aircraft, including OXCART, at Kadena, Incirlik and other overseas bases. Furthermore, the traditional AF/Navy competition on U-2 carrier operations might rule out that attractive possibility if the Air Force takes over control of cover overflights. The job is an unseamy one, full of complications and delicacy and - for my money - one that CIA is best able to perform.

ALBERT D. WHEELON
Deputy Director
(Science and Technology)

cc: Dr. Baker
Gen. Doolittle
Dr. Land

Distribution:

- 1 - Addressee
- 2 - Dr. Baker
- 3 - Gen. Doolittle
- 4 - Dr. Land
- 5 - Mr. Bross
- 6 - Dr. Wheelon

- 7 - ADW Chrono
- 8 - DD/S&T Chrono
- 9 - DD/S&T Registry Subj

25X1